



AN AGREEMENT

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY LIBRARY
SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

A letter recently sent out from the President's Office with regard to the Chicago "Statement" contains an "Agreement" that was reached "with representatives of the Signers." It should be noted that this "Agreement" is not the outcome of the discussions by the "Ten and Ten." For the official report of the "Ten," appointed by the venerable President of our Synod to confer with the "Ten" representing the Signers, does not show that any agreement on the controverted issues raised in the "Statement" has been reached.

It is clear that this "Agreement" does not resolve those difficulties and clear up those issues that have been raised in the "Statement." It is rather to inaugurate another procedure in discussing the issues involved. It was the general understanding of our pastors that the "Ten," appointed by the President, were to discuss these issues with the "Ten" representing the Signers, and they were to do so on the basis of the "Statement" and the "Accompanying Letter," in which these issues were raised. But now these issues are to be discussed, not on the basis of the "Statement," but on the "basis of theses prepared under the auspices of the President."

For we read in this "Agreement": "It has therefore been agreed that—A Statement' and 'The Accompanying Letter' be withdrawn **as a basis of discussion**, so that the issues involved may be studied objectively on the basis of theses prepared under the auspices of the President of Synod. The withdrawal of 'A Statement' as a basis of discussion **shall not be interpreted as a retraction**; nor shall it mean that the issues involved shall now be glossed over or ignored." (The emphases are our own.)

Now what does this mean? The "Statement" and the "Letter" are not withdrawn or retracted as such; but only as "a basis of discussion." Both documents stand intact as to their wording, their meaning, their implications, and accusations. The Signers have retracted nothing they have said in these documents, they only withdrew them as "a basis of discussion." That means, we are not to discuss these documents any more, are not to correct and reprove the Signers for what they here say and charge; but what they say and charge stands, for the withdrawal "shall not be interpreted as a retraction."

All this seems rather strange to us. In spite of the protest of the President of Synod, the Signers felt justified in publishing the "Statement and Letter," and sent it to all pastors of Synod, evidently for the purpose of study and discussion. And this has been done, as the many protests that have been entered against these documents plainly show. Now we are told that these documents are no longer "a basis of discussion." That means: We have told you what we think about certain practices and tendencies in our Synod and about the interpretation and application of certain Bible texts, and this we do not retract; but we do not want you to discuss what we have said and do not want you to attack us on what we have published; we do not retract "Statement and Letter," but we withdraw them as "a basis of discussion."

Is that fair? Is that Christian? Suppose I call a man a liar. He demands proof or retraction. I answer, I withdraw my statement as a basis for discussion, but this shall not be interpreted as a retraction. Will the man be satisfied with such a subterfuge?

More grievous charges are made in the "Statement." To mention but one. In the antithesis to Point Two the Signers say: "We deplore a tendency in our Synod to substitute human judgments, synodical resolutions, or other sources of authority for the supreme authority of Scripture." The Signers do not merely say that it is sinful and wicked to do such things; for this we all readily admit. Nor do they merely warn us against such things; for such warning is at all times necessary also for us. But they deplore that the tendency to do this really exists in our Synod, that this wicked thing is actually being done. For you can "deplore" such things only as you know or believe to be **facts**. Hence this statement, as it reads, is an accusation that the wicked thing mentioned is actually being done in our Synod. No proof is offered, merely the charge is made. Now the Signers tell us: We do not retract the "Statement," what we have said remains said; but we withdraw it "as a basis of discussion," Now, is that a fair proposition?

But we are told that "The issues involved shall not be glossed over or ignored, but shall be objectively discussed on the basis of theses prepared under the auspices of the President of Synod." Does anyone honestly think that this can be done? Let us be clear on this, **Which are the issues involved?** Let us again, for example, take Point Two of the "Statement." The issue is not in the affirmation, "We affirm our faith in the great Lutheran principle of the inerrancy, certainty, all-sufficiency of Holy Writ." We also affirm that. The issue is not that it is a wicked and sinful thing "to substitute human judgments, synodical resolutions, or other sources of authority for the supreme authority of Scripture." We fully agree with this. But the issue is this, "We deplore a tendency in our Synod" to do this wicked thing. If these words mean anything at all, they imply a charge and accusation against Synod. Again, in Point Four we read: "We therefore deplore a loveless attitude which is manifesting itself within Synod." Here we have the definite charge that such loveless attitude **is** manifesting itself in our Synod. And in Point Five; "We deplore the **fact** that Rom. 16:17,18 has been applied to Christians who differ from us in certain points of doctrine." Here we are told that we have in the past misinterpreted and misapplied this Bible text. Furthermore, the wording of some of the statements is so vague and ambiguous as to open the door to selective church fellowship, and unionism. **These are the issues involved**, and we must not permit the discussion to be diverted to matters that are not controverted. But how, in the name of common sense, can anyone discuss these issues objectively, when the "Statement," which raised these issues, is withdrawn as "a basis of discussion"? An objective discussion of "Sola Scriptura" does not remove the charge that a tendency exists in our Synod "to substitute human judgments, synodical resolutions, or other sources of authority for the supreme authority of Scripture." It is simply impossible to discuss the **real** issues raised by the "Statement" without making the "Statement and its Letter" the basis of discussion.

Again we read: "The discussions have shown that interpretations of some expressions in the accompanying letter and in the deplorations have been made which were not intended by the Signers. The language is not always clear to everyone." We cannot judge, and have never judged, the intentions of the Signers, but only their words and what these words mean.

If the words used do not express what these men meant to say, then the honorable and sensible thing for them to do is to retract these words, and tell us plainly what they really mean.

Or are we to assume that hundreds of our pastors, who protested against these two documents, are so inept as not to understand the English language and what the plain words of these documents mean? Are we to assume that men outside of our Synod, who hailed "A Statement" as a definite departure from the former stand of our Synod, are so dull as not to understand what was said and charged in these documents? As to the intent and meaning of the expressions used in these documents we are not solely dependent on the wording therein used; we have reliable information both in the essays read in the meeting of the original Signers in Chicago before they signed the document, and also in the subsequent articles published in defense of said "Statement" in the brochure "Speaking the Truth in Love."

It is, therefore, quite incomprehensible to us how these men can say that they were misunderstood. If "the language is not always clear to everyone," then the fault lies not with those who "misunderstood" the language, but with those who used the language not clearly expressing what they meant to say. And if that is the case, then the Signers should certainly be willing to retract the "Statement" and the "Letter." Especially should they be ready to do so since the Continuation Committee has already admitted that the antitheses contain human judgments the validity of which is "debatable." Having made this significant and far-reaching admission, and seeing how their words are being understood within and without our Synod, it seems that the honorable and Christian thing to do is to retract "Statement and accompanying Letter."

As long as the "Statement" stands, it will continue to be a barrier between the Signers and the rest of us. And its iniquitous leaven will work and continue to work; it will pass from professors to students, from preachers to hearers. Also this leaven must be purged out. If the "Statement" is not retracted by the Signers, it should be rejected by Synod.

—E. W. A. Koehler,
February 14, 1947